

Who should we select to serve on the board?

“The recruitment of talented, team-oriented board members may be the number one issue facing the nonprofit sector in the 21st century.” National Center for Nonprofit Boards

Every board needs new members at one time or another, depending on the organization’s policy on board member terms. Often selecting new board members is the sole purpose of a nominating committee. This process is one of the single most important decisions the board makes and can be a crucial factor in the future sustainability of the organization.

In the past, the general school of thought has encouraged board member selection from high profile community members. This “padding the letterhead” approach can often lead to unmotivated “name only” board members who seldom attend meetings or try to control meetings. This is not to say that these people are not appropriate for board member recruitment, merely that their status or name should not be the **only** consideration.

Another common problem with board selection that occurs often in arts and cultural organizations is selecting only artists to serve on the board. This creates a very narrow-minded organizational view and often leads to dysfunction.

When selecting board members, the existing board or nominating committee may want to make several considerations to ensure that their board incorporates diversity, community representation, a variety of skills, talents and above all, common values.

What are the current needs of the organization and what type of person could assist in meeting those needs?

If your organization has limited resources and is in need of someone who understands budgetary issues, consider recruiting a person with those skills. If you need to develop a new program that requires some experience, look for someone who has had past experience in that arena. For instance, a board may want to recruit a person with special events experience if they recently decided to hold an annual special event for a fundraiser. If you have scanned your environment during a board retreat and decided that you need someone on the board to represent the business community, a close look at people who have local business experience would be a good place to begin your search. Keep in mind that often people do not want to be considered solely on the merits of their professional skills. Some professionals are looking for a respite from their day-to-day careers. Clarity about their role from the onset of their board membership will eliminate any misunderstanding of why they were asked to serve on the board.

Consider your constituency when selecting board members.

As stated in Chapter Two, one of a board member's key roles is being an advocate for the organization in the community. In trying to create a balanced board, consider having someone on the board who is respected by each of your key allies within the community. For example, if you are an arts council of a community with diverse ethnic groups, consider someone who represents those groups or is respected by them. This is not advocating token diversity representation but attempting to give some voice to the constituency you serve. An arts festival board may want to have representation from all art genres as well as the business and education community.

Look for people who are "wealthy."

This **does not** just mean financially well-to-do people. Money is not the only consideration for "wealthy." This includes people who are wealthy with experience, wealthy with abilities and skills, wealthy with community connections or simply generous with their time. Members with a balance of all of these kinds of wealth create a board with a variety of resources to access.

Develop a potential board member profile.

With input from the entire board, the nominating committee or designated board members can be proactive in board member selection by developing a board member profile or specific job description that reflects the current needs of the organization. These needs may be related to skill sets, constituency representation, diversity issues, or other desired experience or qualifications needed. In addition, this may be a good time to articulate the values of the organization and use those values as a tool for evaluating future board members. A few characteristics you may want to consider to develop a board member profile include but are not limited to the following:

CHARACTERISTICS OF POTENTIAL BOARD MEMBERS

- Has prior experience serving on nonprofit boards
- Is able to attend meetings as designated in bylaws
- Is a past donor for the organization
- Is an ongoing patron at organization's events
- Represents the constituency or other key stakeholders
- Is known for leadership qualities in other organizations
- Has specialized knowledge needed
- Has donor connections or networks with known donors
- Adds balance to the board in terms of gender, age, ethnicity
- Known as a good team player
- Has connections or experience with local government

It is important to understand how a person will add to the ability of the group to make decisions. You will need a sense not only of a person's gifts, knowledge, and contacts but also a sense of how that person is able to function as a member of a group.

-----Barbara E Taylor, Academic Search Consultant Service

Make the time to nurture future board members and assure values alignment.

Nonprofit organizations seldom take the necessary time to nurture future board members. Imagine a large corporation hiring a high profile employee without investing hours of time to interview, check references and make sure that person is a good fit for the job. Some of your best board members will come from volunteers who have had a chance to work with the organization and are committed to the mission and vision. If they have had a chance to work in the organization, it will be much easier to assess their commitment level and assess if their values align with those of the organization.

After a prospective board member has been identified, taking the time to nurture that person will pay great dividends. Not only will prospective members have a chance to understand the organization and expectations related to the role of a board member, but they will appreciate knowing there are no surprises later on.

Begin the orientation process during recruitment.

As you are nurturing future prospective board members, begin to perpetuate a model for responsible governance by informing the prospective member of the organization's governing policies, role expectations, program strategies, organizational history and other information that would normally be included in a more formal orientation. They should also have a clear understanding of the values, mission, and vision of the organization. By taking the time to do this during the recruitment process, board members can make an informed decision with their eyes open as to whether they can be a productive, committed board member.

Have a recruitment process or plan in place.

Adopt an ongoing method of recruitment with input from all board members. There are many possible options of the type of structure needed for the purpose of board member recruitment. Some nonprofit experts suggest using a governance committee solely for the purpose of creating profiles on prospective board members, interviewing those prospects and nominating their top selections for the general board's approval. This committee could also be given the task to put in place a process of evaluation or board member assessment. Often, people in organizations haphazardly suggest names for future board members based on casual acquaintance. Imagine hiring someone in a corporation on that basis, yet this person will make many decisions that are equally as important to the organization. Giving considerable time and thought to a recruitment

process or plan, making that process part of your bylaws, and implementing that process will contribute to the continuity and stabilization of the board.



IDEAS & TOOLS TO USE THIS INFORMATION

As a Board Member:

- Always keep board member development in mind when meeting people in the community. Be the ears of the board and learn about the people who may have the needed talents, skills, or connections for the organization.
- Nurture relationships with others who seem to have shared values. Share the organization's vision and mission with them.
- Mentor new board members as they come into the organization. Help them understand the policies and programs so they will soon feel comfortable enough to begin contributing to the organization.
- Adopt an ongoing method of recruitment.

As a Board Chair:

- Remind board members of the need to continually nurture potential new board members in the community.
- Ask for ongoing input from the board as to the needs they perceive the organization to have and who they think would be the best possible board members to fill those needs.
- Assist in developing a board member profile reflecting the needs of the organization.
- Take the time to interview prospective board members to assure values alignment and other expectations are met.

As an Executive Director:

- Assist in the development of a prospective board member profile. If the profile is getting slim, spend a few minutes at board meetings asking the board to brainstorm some new potential board members to add to the list.
Assist with orientation of new board members. Prepare a board manual for each new board member. **See following suggestions.**

Possible things to include in a board member orientation packet:

1. History of the organization.
2. Mission , vision, values statements
3. Past two years' budgets
4. Bios and pictures of all current board members/staff (phone #s and other pertinent information)
5. Current organizational programs and events
6. Board structure, organizational chart
7. Bylaws and Articles of Incorporation
8. Committees
9. Past kudos, newspaper articles, brochures etc.
10. Description of board member roles and responsibilities
11. Schedule of upcoming events, board meetings, committee meetings etc.
12. Current long range plan (Strategic Plan) with goals and objectives outlined.

